

INNOVATION WITH ISO

ABOUT SEACOLE SPECIALTY CHEMICAL. Seacole is a Plymouth, Minnesota-based chemical manufacturing and distribution company. It buys chemical components and blends them into new products for customers. In total, Seacole manufactures approximately 2,000 products at its 85,000-square-foot facility. Its capabilities include creating chemical products for surface finishing, printed circuit boards, industrial cleaning, railroad and other transportation, agriculture, and laboratories.

THE CHALLENGE. For Seacole, the reasons to become ISO certified numbered in the millions. Several potential customers had lucrative business for the Plymouth company, but Seacole needed the ISO credential to win it. CEO and owner Gregg Elliott found that requests for ISO vendors kept coming from higher up the supply chain in industries ranging from medical device to automotive and aerospace. If Seacole wanted to keep growing, it would need to take the ISO plunge.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Elliott had long studied the way ISO could institutionalize processes, reduce mistakes, and better exploit the capabilities of his ERP system. Yet the ultimate tipping point for his decision to take on ISO was prompted by a tip that executives at Dow Chemical wanted to subcontract a considerable chunk of work to Seacole—but only after the company achieved its ISO certification.

After canvassing an assortment of consulting organizations, Elliott and his managers chose Enterprise Minnesota, part of the MEP National Network™, to guide their path to ISO certification. "We looked at a lot of other options, to be honest," Elliott said. "You can go online and almost get a mail order ISO program. You send them a bunch of information, they send you back a bunch of information, SOPs, and then you go through your certification. It's very easy and pretty cost-effective, but you really don't get much out of it. You really don't improve your company doing it that way."

Since becoming ISO certified, Seacole has notched close to \$2 million in annual revenue from the Dow relationship, with more coming. ISO certification also enabled Seacole's entrance into the National Association of Chemical Distributors, a large national association whose members move about 90 percent of the chemical products in the United States. That membership, he said, opened the door to a new customer relationship with BASF, the world's largest chemical producer.

"We're growing at a clip of between 10 and 12 percent a year right now, and I think it's largely because of our ISO," he said.

"The ISO 9001:2015 process used inter-department cooperation to develop greater efficiencies, which also really empowered our employees. We're making fewer mistakes, and we're not repeating them, which is even more important. In an era when employee retention is a top priority, the ISO process gave them a feeling that they were part of the process. It really helps us retain the employees we have."

-Gregg Elliott, CEO and Owner

RESULTS



\$2,000,000 in new or retained sales



\$1,250,000 in new investment



2 created or retained jobs

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